DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 042 443 JC 700 205

AUTHOR Maner, Arnold H.
TITLE Public Relations for Comprehensive Community Colleges.
PUB DATE [70]
NOTE 15p.

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.85
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Role, *Information Dissemination, *Junior Colleges, Mass Media, Program Planning, *Public Relations, School Community Relationship, Teacher Role, Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a synthesis of selected literature on junior college public relations, with emphasis on occupationally oriented programs. Its purpose is to develop a tentative plan to assist in the growth of career education programs in the 2-year college. Subject areas investigated include: (1) the need for public relations; (2) the role of the Director of Career Education and other personnel involved in public relations programs; (3) the identification of the publics involved; (4) the use of media; (5) the factors affecting student enrollment and persistence; and (6) the planning of a public relations program. (Author/JO)

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PUBLIC RELATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Introduction

This paper represents a synthesis of selected literature on school public relations, with emphasis on occupationally oriented programs in the junior/community college. The purpose is to develop a tentative plan to assist in the growth of Career Education programs in the community college setting. The areas investigated include the need for public relations, personnel involved in the P.R. program, identification of the publics, utilization of media, research studies, and planning the public relations program.

The Need for Public Relations

The need of planned public relations for occupational programs has been well defined in the literature. Feirer (5) states that industrial education has two images. "The inner image reflects what the teachers and students in industrial education think of the program. The outer image is what the public thinks." He goes on to state that "While we have many dedicated teachers in industrial education and many students who are benefiting from the

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program, our outer image falls far short of what it could be and what it ought to be." According to the author, the reasons for this sad state of affairs is that the average American holds a relatively low opinion of people who work with tools, materials, and processes.

Harper (8), in discussing key problems relating to the Junior College, stressed the need for finding more effective ways to bring about better understanding of occupational education among young people and their parents. He also expressed the necessity of improving the "image" of occupational curriculums and the careers to which they lead, correcting unrealistic employer attitudes, and the "creation of effective lines of communication within institutions to promote better understanding of career programs." Recommendations for improving the "image" included "cooperative efforts with the public relations departments of labor unions, articles in periodicals of mass circulation, and contacts with individual firms to obtain 'success stories' relating to junior college graduates they employ."

Warren (18) discussed the tendency of community colleges to drift toward domination by the college transfer programs as being the possible result of

"insufficient exposure of the comprehensive aspects of the institution." He emphasizes the fact that in addition to the necessity of promoting individual programs needing a "push" that the community college faces the chore of developing a unified image. "This image is necessary if legislators, business and industry leaders, and the general public are to adequately understand and support the institution."

Personnel Involved

There should be little doubt that the Director of Career Education is a key figure in a public relations program. The AVA (17) outlined some of the responsibilities of the Director. The Director should:

1. Create a worthwhile educational program.
2. Obtain a public relations policy statement from his superiors.
3. Take an active role in job placement.
4. Circulate within the community, making contacts with key people.
5. Take care not to make exaggerated claims.
6. Establish good relationship with the press.
7. Avoid active involvement in politics.
8. Be cost conscious in relation to his programs.
9. Forget inhibitions about immodesty. The public has a right to know. Tell the story often.

10. Keep his superiors informed relative to new developments.

11. Be active in community groups, but take care not to get the reputation for wanting to run the town.

12. Work to make his staff "publicity conscious."

Miller (12), and Nichols (14), emphasize the teacher's role in public relations. Miller maintains that the teacher should accept the responsibility for going to the editor of the local paper and telling him what he has in mind in the way of planning a program to enlighten the public as to the activities of the particular department. Nichols pointed out that some teachers consider advertising unprofessional, some believe that the work should speak for itself, while still others have not thought about public relations. "They have traditionally been under the illusion that their sole responsibility was receiving and careing for those (students) who came." Nichols believes that these people need to examine their professional publications more closely, and take a more active part in public relations.

Muro (13) believes that the counselor is better equipped to shape public relations. He maintains that the "school board and staff usually are long on sympathy and short on time and ability...and administrators

are only a little better suited for the job." The main reasons the counselor can be effective is that "counselors don't have to assign grades, maintain discipline, justify budgets... or explain tax increases." The counselor meets the public in an atmosphere more psychologically conducive for a public relations effort.

Crawford (2) discussed the public relations aspect of placement. "By definition and tradition, the placement director is responsible for maintaining a continuing dialogue with the employer representatives who visit his campus." He believes that with little additional effort, and the promise of substantially greater benefits, the placement director could explore new products and production techniques which could be of interest to faculty who teach in related areas, opportunities for summer employment, possibilities for grants of equipment, company sponsored scholarships, and implications for curricular improvements.

Warren (18) maintains that the public relations job in a comprehensive community college "cannot be done by administrators in their spare time, nor can it be done by instructors on a part-time basis, though all should be involved." He advocates the employment of a specialist, experienced in the use of mass media and community relations activities to coordinate the public relations program.

The Publics

Penk (15) grouped the "publics," to which an informational program should be directed, into seven major classifications:

1. Faculty and Staff. The school faculty and staff have a dual role. They contact the general public, but they also have their own interests and needs.

2. The student body. This is the most frequently neglected of the school's publics. They should be the primary audience because they are both the immediate clientele and the future support of public education.

3. Former students. Some students need post-graduate counseling. They should be treated with courtesy and respect.

4. Prospective students. New and prospective students should be provided with a lucid reference for what is expected relative to school policies and regulations.

5. Parents. Parents should be kept informed of the progress of their sons and daughters. This is the school's responsibility.

6. Business Community. The business community should be consulted for advise in streamlining school operations. This will enable the school to improve its procedures and strengthen its bond with the business community.

7. The taxpayers. The public relations program for this public must be continuous. An understanding of the school is more effective in preventing taxpayer opposition than it is in stemming negative opinions once they have been formed. More important, the story of the human values accomplished through the school program should be told.

The AVA (17) listed those contacts which were considered essential for the Director to make in carrying out his duties. A copy of this breakdown is included below.

RATE YOUR PUBLIC RELATIONS

So that you can take an inventory of accomplishments and progress in your public relations activities, here is a checklist of necessary contacts for all vocational education personnel. Fill in your special publics at the bottom, so that the list fits your own particular situation, and rate yourself periodically.

DATE / CONTACTS	Excellent	Good	Improve	Excellent	Good	Improve	Excellent	Good	Improve
Students									
Alumni									
Youth Clubs									
Fellow Teachers									
Guidance Personnel									
Supervisors									
Administrators									
Board of Education									
Educational Associations									
Parents									
Civic Groups									
Social and Fraternal Groups									
Women's Clubs									
Service Clubs									
Chambers of Commerce									
Farm Associations									
Trade Associations									
Labor Organizations									
Employment Agencies									
Businessmen's Organizations									
Merchants' Groups									
Employers									
Advisory Committees									
Federal Agencies									
Legislators									
State Colleges and Universities									
Newspaper Staff									
Radio and TV Station Staff									
Magazine Editors									
Other Special Publics									

Media

Other than by personal contacts there are various means to "tell the story" of the school program to the "publics." Penk (15) and Harper (8) discussed the need for internal communications. The staff newspaper or newsletter was mentioned, along with its obvious disadvantages and limitations. It does, however, provide a format for intrasystem communications. Nichols (14) advocates "structuring the school newspaper toward the home,"as representing a means of reaching parents.

Miller (12) discussed the utilization of newspapers, radio, and television, in reaching the publics. He states that the local paper is "usually very happy to print news of the activities of the school." In relation to radio he states that most people think of radio in terms of advertising, but that the school can often arrange with the station manager or program director for public service features on special interest programs of the school. In discussing television, Miller advocates student involvement. He believes that as many students as possible should be used in a television performance, and that their individual work in the school program should be featured.

The AAJC (11) has a thirty-two page "viewbook" entitled

"Many Things to Many People," which they advocate as being "helpful in communications with localities or groups who need to become more familiar with junior colleges." It is recommended that this publication be given to boards of trustees, advisory committees, prospective students, new faculty members, high school counselors, legislative committees, local foundations, business leaders, news media, PTA Chapters, public libraries, doctor's offices, professional societies, voter organizations, visitors, four-year colleges, student leaders, municipal government, financial contributors, civic clubs, county officials, ministers, alumni, orientation groups, and fund raising committees. In large quantities (1000) the books are 45 cents each.

Research Studies

Specific studies which were consulted related to the use of newspapers, and reasons why high school graduates do/do not go on to junior colleges. Gordon (7) found that it was "highly doubtful that the citizens were being adequately informed on the activities, programs, and goals of the schools by the local newspapers." School news constituted less that 2 percent of all the news in the study. With the elimination of school sports and other extra-curricular activities, the figure was less than three-fourths of one percent.

Fantl (4), and Krejcie (10), discussed reasons why students enrolled in Technical Institute level programs. Fantl stated that the most effective means of encouraging students to enroll in technical programs was through the use of student to student contact. Radio-TV-Newspapers, and word of mouth promotion accounted for approximately 50 percent of the successful recruiting effort. He also indicated that his school passed out free book covers with high school athletic schedules with a list of the college's program offerings also included. Krejcie found that counselors and teachers have a relatively high influence on these enrollment decisions. Such decisions are generally made in grades 11 and 12. Radio and TV announcements are not used extensively nor are they a major influence. Written media appears to have greater influence than picture media, college catalogs and program descriptions are the most used and influential written media, three percent of the students are influenced by advertising in college newspapers, and descriptions of employment and career opportunities are influential despite their source.

Classen (1) investigated factors that deter high school graduates from continuing their education in a junior college district. The reasons given included

lack of student interest, poor high school record, armed service duty, lack of money, parental opposition, marriage, no need for further training, no college atmosphere, lack of certain courses, and limited campus life. The recommendations included more intensified high school guidance program, with parents included in the discussion; continued publicity for the local college assets; and more involvement of parents and of the community in general.

Planning for Public Relations

Dennison (3) suggested an eight point plan for an organized public relations effort:

1. Establish objectives. Decide what publics are to be reached.
2. Research. Find out what these publics now believe about your objectives.
3. Reorientation of objectives. Change your plan in terms of the obtainable.
4. Determine your themes. Get your ideas from what the public currently believes.
5. Strategy. Pick the best approach.
6. Organization. Work within the operational plan set up in your school.
7. Planning. Map out a calendar for PR.
8. Tactics. Select techniques and media.

The AVA (17) provided a suggested "calendar" for the Director. They state that it is only a guide but that it might help stimulate ideas. A copy is included below.

PLAN A PUBLIC RELATIONS CALENDAR

Suggestions are outlined here for six months of the year. This is not meant to be inclusive but is intended to stimulate your own ideas. Develop a similar calendar to fit the needs of your own locality and vocational program and consult it each month to prepare for well-balanced and continuous public relations activities.

SEPTEMBER

Plan orientation program for new students and teachers

Renew acquaintance with newspaper editor and reporters, radio and TV program managers.

Send news releases on new equipment, expansion of program, new projects.

Send materials explaining program to parents of new students

Plan schedule of home visitations

Complete plans for the club program for the year and publicize through newspaper and school paper

Set up advisory committees and plan schedule of meetings

Participate in faculty workshop on public relations

MARCH

Provide information about vocational courses to students who may desire to enter the program: make arrangements for tours of your department

Plan a parents' night program for students to demonstrate their work, including a banquet

Send newsletter to graduates and former students

Cooperate in planning exchange visits for teachers and industry, business, and labor groups

Invite the superintendent to attend youth club meeting

Work with school reporter on writing series of features about successful graduates of your classes for local newspaper

Collect occupational information and give to school guidance counselor

Call on photography class to take photos of your students in action

NOVEMBER

Build your public relations activities around American Education Week and participate in all events planned by school

Plan and conduct a radio or TV program explaining purposes, organization, and values of your program

Prepare displays for public places to illustrate instructional content of your program

Invite your state and federal legislators to visit and observe your program

Plan bulletin board displays

MAY

Make plans for participating and exhibiting at state and county fairs

Contact local business, industry, employment agencies, etc., to help place graduates in suitable jobs

Prepare annual reports

Arrange for appropriate graduation ceremonies and publicity for graduates

Hold banquet for parents or employers and show slides of year's activities

Prepare exhibits of students' work for display in store windows

Evaluate results of year's public relations projects

JANUARY

Plan and conduct a student assembly program

Publicize plans for adult vocational classes for second semester

Participate and cooperate in career conferences

Hold Open House for parents and other citizens of the community

Send articles about vocational education to trade papers and professional journals

Speak to local service clubs, veterans organizations, and women's clubs about values of vocational education

Prepare newspaper articles on progress of vocational students

JULY

Attend summer school or workshop on public relations

Attend state conferences

Participate in county and state fairs

Visit parents of students and prospective student

Take summer job in industry

Make plans for next year's public relations activiti

Summary

Planned public relations programs are needed in all schools, and a particular need was expressed in the literature for promoting occupational education. The Director of Career Education is a key person in the successful program, but it is necessary to involve all school personnel, especially the instructional staff. The need for meaningful internal communications within the school was emphasized.

The identification of the various publics and media utilized in reaching them was discussed; and research studies of the effectiveness of programs to promote enrollments were examined, along with factors which inhibit student enrollment in occupational programs.

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Career Education
Southwestern Community College
Creston, Iowa

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